

Sustaining the Marine Corps Martial Arts Program

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Sustaining the Marine Corps Martial Arts Program

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to

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Introduction

Close combat is vital to the Marine Corps, a service that prides itself on being able to "locate, close with, and destroy the enemy..."¹ The Marine Corps has adopted many programs designed to dispatch the enemy at close range. Unfortunately, programs like the Close Combat Instruction (CCI) and the Linear In-fighting Neurological-override Engagement (LINE) system did not completely satisfy the Marine Corps' needs and were virtually incompatible with other Marine Corps training programs due to their limited focus on unarmed combat only. Therefore, the Marine Corps Martial Arts Program (MCMAP) was implemented in the summer of 2000 under the direction of General James L. Jones, 32nd Commandant of the Marine Corps. MCMAP is an integrated, synergistic fighting system incorporating mental, character, and physical disciplines that apply across the entire spectrum of violence.² However, MCMAP may be short lived unless the Marine Corps does a better job of selling the program to all Marines, establishes and enforces overdue requirements, and receives the support of senior leadership.

¹ Marine Corps Warfighting Publication (MCWP) 3-11.2. *Marine Rifle Squad*. Washington, DC: Headquarters US Marine Corps, 02 December 1991, 1-1.

² Commandant of the Marine Corps. Subject: MCO 1500.54A *Marine Corps Martial Arts Program*, 16 December 2002.

Selling the Program

People are constantly bombarded with advertisements on television, radio, billboards, and in printed media. The power of advertising cannot be disputed. The more exposure a product receives, the more likely a person is to try it, especially as the product develops a positive perception among consumers. MCMAP is no different.

In the first few years MCMAP developed a reputation for brutal training that still overshadows the positive results the program offers. The reputation the program received was a result of a "tough-man club" mentality. Instructors abused their position by using techniques at full speed and forced students to do the same to each other. Surviving the program without serious injury obscured the goal to acquire productive, useful skills. Injuries and safety concerns were marginalized by the perceived need to train hard. Furthermore, those that graduated MCMAP under the "tough-man club" mentality continued to perpetuate this type of training in their units.

The need for the transformation was obvious. Lieutenant Colonel Joseph C. Shusko, the current director of the Martial Arts Center of Excellence (MACE), states, "when a 180 pound male MAIT [martial arts instructor trainer] beats a 130 pound female

officer till she is in pain, what does that add to the program?"³

In the last couple of years MCMAP has evolved and matured under the supervision of LtCol Shusko. He and his staff have "stopped making it [MCMAP] a tough man club and tried to make it smart by being teachers now, mentors."⁴

However, the perception of a "tough-man club" still prevails, as evidenced in the decision made by two Expeditionary Warfare School (EWS) captains to delay their MCMAP training. The two captains were weighing the option of training for their gray belts. Their primary concern was the fact that they did not want to get injured prior to reporting to their new unit. Both elected to postpone gray belt training until they completed their permanent change of station (PCS).

MCMAP needs to re-make its image if it is to become a widely accepted discipline. It needs to advertise the new attitude toward training and to influence Marines at all levels, especially senior leadership where participation is lacking. MCMAP can do this through a successful internal campaign similar to the "Stay Marine" campaign designed to increase retention,

³ Lieutenant Colonel Joseph C. Shusko, Director, Martial Arts Center of Excellence. Personal interview conducted 21 Dec 2004. Cited hereafter as Shusko. Brackets indicate authors insert.

⁴ Shusko. Brackets indicate author's insert.

which appeared in magazines such as *Marine Magazine*, *Leatherneck*, and *Marine Corps Gazette*.

One of the simplest ways to boost the program is to arm MCMAP graduates with a new message about the new training guidelines. Another method would be to develop a supervised competition similar to squad-a-thons or super-squad competitions. Moreover, Marines can show off their skills and bond together.

With the shift to re-make the image, MCMAP should be made more available and get additional certified instructors in the field to spread its message. Currently, the MACE is the only place where a Marine can become certified to be a MAIT.

Satellite schools can be established under the watchful eye of the MACE, such as Special Operations Training Group (SOTG) East and West, as well as a Far East MCMAP school. By increasing the number of schools that conduct MAIT certification, MCMAP would quadruple its instructor trainers. Injecting four times as many instructors should directly impact the number of Marines receiving training in MCMAP and help to establish it as a legitimate program.

Establishing and Enforcing Regulations

MCMAP was initiated in the summer of 2000 and designed to "address the full spectrum of the force continuum of the battlefield," as well as to fulfill "the need to build Marines with the mental and character traits required to succeed in the

future.”⁵ Nearly a year later, ALMAR 042/01 was released formally announcing the establishment of MCMAP. It was followed by MARADMIN 537/01, which outlined the program and established immediate and long-term goals. Finally, in December of 2002, Marine Corps Order (MCO) 1500.54A: *Marine Corps Martial Arts Program* was released; however, for unit commanders who maintain the bulk of Marines, the order only contained recommendations with regard to implementation and utilization of MCMAP. The MCMAP order needs to be revised to include clear requirements not only for the Training and Education Command (TECOM), Recruit Depots, The Basic School (TBS), and the MACE but also for unit commanders and individual Marines as well.

Early on, ALMAR 042/01 discussed ways to institutionalize and promote career long commitment to MCMAP by possibly tying it to promotions and the performance evaluation system. As of January 2005, no such measures have been established. Even though MCMAP has spread throughout the Marine Corps, there are units and Marines that still view MCMAP in terms of the goals and recommendations set forth in MARADMIN 537/01 and MCO 1500.54A, respectively. Until MCMAP becomes fully institutionalized, like the rifle range or the physical fitness test (PFT), it will always be in jeopardy of becoming extinct like its predecessors,

⁵ MCO 1500.54A, 3.

CCI and LINE. For example, requiring that certain belts be acquired at particular ranks would tie the program to promotions. Similarly, implementing mandatory MCMAP training as part of the unit PT program would absolve those arguments by units and commanders who dissect the ALMARs, MARADMINs, and MCOs and say a "goal isn't something you have to achieve as long as you are working toward it."⁶ The MACE can reduce the amount of friction that MCMAP experiences by requesting that General Michael W. Hagee, 33rd Commandant of the Marine Corps, publish guidance making MCMAP mandatory for all units and initiating requirements for Marines to meet for promotions and fitness reports/proficiency and conduct marks. MCMAP started as a CMC initiative in 2000; without continued CMC backing, MCMAP is at risk for succumbing to the same fate as previous close combat programs.

Furthermore, requirements for each Marine and their unit MAIT to maintain records of documented sustainment training would facilitate the institutionalization of MCMAP. In fact, MCMAP should be implemented at all career level schools for sustainment and advancement.⁷ By tying MCMAP to career level schools the Marine Corps will show a definitive, positive commitment to MCMAP

⁶ Shusko.

⁷ Ukeiley, Scott E., Major, USMC. *Making Time for Marine Corps Martial Arts*. 2003. URL: <<http://www.mca-marines.org/gazette/>>, accessed 14 December 2004.

as an integral part of a Marine's education throughout his career.

Enforcing MCMAP requirements would remain functions of Commanding General Inspections (CGI) as well as Inspector General (IG) inspections. However, the MACE should maintain the lead role in identifying deficiencies throughout the Marine Corps and should be utilized to focus the effort on enforcing regulations, submitting a quarterly report to the CMC regarding the status of MCMAP Marine Corps wide. Conducting no-notice inspections to evaluate MCMAP and site-assisted visits designed to help enable a unit set up and conduct long-term martial arts training would also give MCMAP credibility.

Senior Leadership Backing

The Marine Corps ethos of honor, courage, and commitment requires Marines to conduct themselves with integrity, responsibility, accountability, and devotion to the Corps and fellow Marines.⁸ Marines are taught to lead by example and not to expect something from their Marines that they would not expect from themselves. However, active MCMAP participation by officers and staff non-commissioned officers (SNCO) is uncommon. According to LtCol Shusko, "getting total buy in from the senior

⁸ United States Marine Corps Core Values Card

leadership of our Corps" is the biggest problem facing MCMAP.⁹ Unfortunately, MCMAP is still a course that is embraced primarily by junior Marines. Senior leadership, both officer and enlisted, need to embrace the program if they expect their Marines to participate. Marines look to their leaders for direction.

Conclusion

MCMAP is a program that offers added value to the Marine Corps both on and off the battlefield. It mirrors the Marine Corps ethos and arms Marines with skills, knowledge, and values that will continue to be useful to them throughout their careers and lives. However, the MACE must not be lulled into complacency, thinking that MCMAP has arrived as part of the Marine Corps institution just yet. It should constantly sell the program, whether it is to the potential recruit, the gunnery sergeant with 15 years of service, or the Commandant, himself. The leaders of the Corps at all levels must be the primary target audience and recognize the value that MCMAP brings to the table. Moreover, they must require MCMAP participation of themselves and all their Marines. Ultimately, the Marine Corps needs to reinforce its commitment to this program by implementing requirements that place the program on equal footing as other established programs, such as professional military education (PME), rifle range, and the PFT.

⁹ Shusko E-mail, 01 February 2005

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